

An Important Weapon in COIN Operations:

THE KEY LEADER'S ENGAGEMENT

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During Operation Enduring Freedom VIII, Havoc Company of Task Force Eagle (1st Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment, 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team) maintained the unique responsibility of executing counterinsurgency (COIN) operations in an area of Afghanistan roughly equal to that of the remainder of the battalion. Taken at its greatest dimensions, our area of operations (AO) measured 106 kilometers north to south and 71 kilometers east to west. This roughly 7,000 square kilometers of very sparsely-wooded mountainous desert comprised the three separate districts of Surobi, Charbaran and Gomal; all within Paktika Province of Regional Command (RC) East. Two of these districts, Charbaran and Gomal, were ones that had seen absolute minimal effort put forth within all lines of operation (LoO) in the more than six years of coalition force (CF) operations in RC East. With Charbaran and Gomal Districts lacking any true road networks and virtually no influential or widely regarded population centers, COIN efforts seemed daunting. The unique challenges of our battlespace forced us to maximize our efforts in every LoO; especially in the governance LoO, with particular emphasis in counter-corruption efforts. In these efforts, the key leader's engagement (KLE) was our greatest weapon.

With Havoc Company elements typically conducting five to seven hours of movement to arrive at a population center, the need to make every minute of the KLE have lasting impact cannot be overstated. The "tyranny of distance" that dominated all our planning considerations within AO Havoc obligated us to closely review our KLE procedures. What follows is a road map for best achieving the desired outcome of each KLE. The recommendations are intended to serve a small unit leader in addressing the most dominant planning considerations of the KLE. Each of these planning considerations is presented with the singular goal of making each moment spent within the KLE productive and efficient. Havoc Company leaders arrived at these recommendations through tough lessons learned in several inefficient and sometimes difficult KLEs in Gomal, Surobi and Charbaran Districts. Our goal is to thwart such unproductive and painstaking hours for other small unit leaders operating in eastern Afghanistan and pass on lessons that will afford a greater likelihood to achieve immediate desired effects and a greater opportunity to build meaningful bonds with your local Afghan leaders.

Our Unique Challenges

The battlespace allocated to Havoc Company was, in its greatest majority, uninhabited and inhospitable; being decidedly unable to support any type of subsistence farming of even the greatest efforts. The few groupings of qualats (high-walled, multiple family-dwelling



courtyards) that represented each village were usually positioned within the battlespace simply because of their adjacent location to a small section of semi-fertile land and decidedly not because of their proximity to a trafficable LoC. Furthering the hardships in Gomal and Charbaran, the lack of any year-round effective roads barred any successful centers of commerce from fully developing. The only considerable volume of trading or traffic in AO Havoc was in support of the illegal practice of timber logging. Even with the very lucrative nature of this practice, there were few Afghans who benefited from it, and extreme poverty was the norm throughout our battlespace. Throughout Gomal, and especially in Charbaran, there existed a wide-ranging indifference for

change and no true understanding of what was possible with future change brought by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA). Surobi was the only area demonstrating any progress in the LoOs, but this was due only to its high number of residents who preserved an association with government corruption at the national level. Surobi remained the "hidden retreat" for many corrupt officials, and it benefited somewhat because of this fact — yet gains were limited and isolated at best. As a rule, all these social and economic factors (along with the incredibly irresistible lure of rapid income from al Qaeda, Hezb-I Islam/Gulbuddin (HiG) and Taliban elements in-transit) set conditions in Surobi, Charbaran and Gomal that made it very difficult to influence the human terrain in the COIN fight.

However permissible the conditions in AO Havoc might seem for anti-coalition militant (ACM) efforts, ACMs were also subjected to the same difficult dynamics of both the human and geographic terrain. No operational advantage existed for any of the population centers, and no major routes existed — thus nothing to tax or outrightly control. With these impediments, movement facilitation was arduous and risky and those who assisted ACMs were very well rewarded. This led to corruption of the highest order — as high as our local Afghan Border Police Kandak (battalion) commander.

Our greatest strength in confronting the corruption and the social and economic conditions was our mobility, which afforded us the chance to extend our reach to any of the villages within our battlespace. But, that strength came at a very high price if solely in regards to the time invested into each grueling inbound and outbound movement. The time invested was not the only concern as these prolonged movements on the unimproved routes proved extremely taxing on both men and equipment. Balancing the need to conduct engagements in the most remote corners of our battlespace with the impacts of Soldier fatigue and recurrent vehicle damage, we arrived at a 72-hour patrol as the ideal. After factoring in the number of villages deemed critical to maintain presence in

and overlaying the 72-hour model, we discovered that we could effectively expect to conduct a KLE at most once every two weeks and at a minimum once a month in each of our villages of interest. Because our visits were so infrequent, we had to increase the accuracy of our greatest weapon in the COIN fight — KLEs.

Why the KLE is the Greatest Weapon in COIN

In combating the insurgency in eastern Afghanistan, it is very easy for leaders to become overly focused on kinetic operations. It is characteristic of our culture to demand success from below and be eager to report success to those above; and it is immeasurably easier to prove success against an armed enemy than it is to gauge and prove success within a population. In direct action operations, the metrics are obvious and the feedback near-instantaneous. In winning the population, the feedback is terribly sluggish, very often unclear, and always subject to unique cultural perspective for tribal affiliation or ethnic population. This makes metrics for winning the population nearly impossible to record, and the pressure to demonstrate success through metrics provokes many leaders to place secondary efforts on the population and primary effort on generating enemy killed in action (EKIA).

The hard-fought and time intensive tasks of engaging leaders and countering negative thoughts with increased hope and greater understanding provide genuine progress in winning the population. Generating a confidence that change will bring about greater opportunity, building a commitment to the harder right rather than passive compliance with the general wrong, and inspiring Afghans that they can have a hand in their own future is really what will truly win the population. Providing reason for hope and demonstrating genuine concern is possible only through dialogue with those whose future would be affected by such change. The KLE is the only tool that presents the opportunity to influence the population in this manner. The KLE is the only tool that affords a legitimate and socially agreeable reason to enter a village. The KLE confirms your role as the CF leader responsible for the area and interested in its circumstances. Most importantly, the KLE legitimizes the idea that CF work for the Afghan people and creates an outlook of

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approachability of your own forces that bolsters the idea that we are an invited force by the GIRoA. The KLE effectively “undemonizes” the “infidel-forces” and ties you to the people and their distinctive issues and concerns. For all these reasons, the KLE is the greatest weapon in creating change within the perceptions of the Afghan people.

Identifying the Leader’s Engagement

CF elements are typically filled with eager and determined leaders and junior leaders and, because determined leaders are always seeking effects attainment, we will frequently confuse a relationship-building meeting with a KLE. A relationship-building meeting is one in which the small unit leader attempts to gain the allegiance of a local national (LN) leader. With the error of misidentification, some leaders will focus on effects attainment when it is best to focus on building allegiances and will conversely undermine effects attainment by focusing on allegiances during moments of greatest opportunity for attaining effects. To clarify the difference between a relationship-building meeting and a KLE, we recommend that small unit leaders consider the fundamental differences in structure and philosophy in a personal counseling session and in a battalion training meeting. The counseling session being the analogy for the relationship-building meeting and the battalion training meeting being analogous to the KLE. Similar to a counseling session, the relationship-building meeting is private in nature and focuses on the individuals and

their personal interaction as part of a larger organization — comments will focus on how to keep the relationship strong and best benefit the individual and the organization. This personal exchange will build the foundation for success in later and more pressing public interactions. And, just as a battalion commander would conduct an initial counseling session with a newly arrived company commander prior to his first training meeting, the small unit leader would be best advised to meet with a new mayor or sub-governor in a relationship-building meeting prior to entering a KLE.

Because the leader’s engagement, again like the training meeting, is a large forum of power brokers who will voice separate concerns and compete for limited resources, the KLE has a uniquely different purpose, a unique approach to success, and therefore absolutely requires structure and preparation. The next paragraphs will address this preparation and the minimal preparation TM Havoc leaders would recommend prior to initiation of a KLE.

Preparing for the KLE

The Audience — In order for the small unit leader to maximize effects in conducting the KLE, it is next necessary that he enter the engagement well aware of what emotions he wants to elicit from his audience. This has two implications for the small unit leader. First, it implies that he has identified his audience, and second, it implies that he has identified how he would like them specifically to react to the KLE. It is through identification of these two critical characteristics that he will be able to best structure his approach toward his objective. In identifying the audience, the leader conducting the engagement can ensure that his comments are appropriate in regards to the level of ceremony or level of candor required by the audience. Consider that an engagement held with an audience of angry and accusatory family members of a deceased LN leader will be distinctly different than an engagement held with an audience of bazaar shop keepers desiring solar lights for their street. Knowing the dynamics of the audience in each case is critical to tailoring your approach for best effects. In identifying the way you would choose to have your audience react to the KLE you create a safety system to help you avoid cultural pitfalls that might inadvertently dominate your audience’s

perceptions and steer them away from your desired effects. In the process of identifying how you want your audience to react, you should question your cultural advisors about how best to arrive at that reaction. You will often find that an approach intuitive through a western world perspective is not necessarily the same approach as is acceptable in the Afghan culture.

The objective of the KLE — Your comments at every KLE must be focused on attaining effects. To have such impact, your KLE comments must have a clear objective. This need to achieve effects demands preparation from the small unit leader and the most fundamental step is identifying the answer to the question of: “what do you want to achieve?”

In a critical moment where a leader is afforded no prior planning, that leader should at a minimum write out his desired outcome for the KLE on a note card. That card should be retained and referenced throughout the engagement as a compass to steer his comments in the course of his opportunity to speak during the KLE. This one step will do more than any other in aiding the unprepared leader to achieve the effects he is after. Keeping the KLE objective card as a ready reference is especially useful for those leaders whose debate or public speaking skills are undeveloped and critically important for the leader whose presence of mind is limited. Because the inexperienced speaker will often drift or get easily pulled into peripheral conversations in the course of the KLE, the note card becomes indispensable in keeping on track with the objective. Writing on the note card is simply the forcing function to hold leaders to identifying a stated objective prior to initiating even the first words of conversation. This is the most basic step and must precede absolutely every KLE.

Agenda — A possible follow-on action after identifying the objective is to build a tentative agenda for the meeting. This step is entirely optional because any agenda you propose is often muddled and abandoned by the Afghan leaders. Remember that it is never the desire for CF to “run” the KLE. The KLE is always an Afghan-led event and you are merely taking the opportunity to speak in your allotted time. If you find yourself running the meeting, then

the purpose is lost and there is no capacity building as a result of the meeting. The primary speaker should always be your Afghan National Police (ANP) chief, your sub-governor, your shurra leader, your National Directorate of Security (NDS) chief, but never CF. Every effort should be made to avoid CF taking the lead. In the rare, but valid instance of an unanticipated gathering at your combat outpost (COP) or forward operating base (FOB) front gate, CF leaders should never react impulsively. If the elders are forced to wait until a corresponding Afghan leader arrives at your COP or FOB, then bring them water and have your Soldiers unroll a carpet for them to sit on while you apologize for the need to wait – but never take the lead in initiating the meeting without your LN counterpart leader.

The only valid reasoning for fully developing an agenda is if you have coordinated for a coaching and mentoring session with your ANP chief, sub-governor, or shurra leader prior to the KLE. In this case it is fitting to develop the agenda and allocate an hour to walking through the agenda in order to inspire a better sense of KLE management within the Afghan leader.

Significance — Writing the objective of the engagement makes immeasurable progress for the small unit leader entering the KLE, but it does not lend immediate significance for the Afghan leader who also attends the KLE. In order to ensure that the KLE members are eager to enter subsequent KLE iterations and eager to support your attack towards the KLE objective, you must identify the Afghan significance in your objective for those that participate in the KLE. This identified significance should also be written out on your note card. It is generally advisable to not make the significance of the KLE the same as your own objective for the KLE, but to nest the significance within your objective. This is crucial because whether you personally achieve your KLE objective or not, there still has to be some significance in the action of attending the KLE for the Afghan leader. You want significance in the information they take away. This will generate effects well beyond the termination of the

Local nationals and coalition force members meet for a key leader's engagement in a village in the Charbaran District of Paktika Province in November 2007.

Photos courtesy of author



KLE.

An example objective and significance is as follows: *You conduct a KLE in response to reports of ANP abuse of power. Your cultural advisor tells you that the reports are originating from the fact that the current ANP force is heavily comprised of ethnic Tajiks despite the fact that the locals are ethnic Pashtus. The subsequent recommended objective of your KLE would be to get elders from the local Pashtu sub-tribe, the Alize, to commit to providing you with 10 police recruits from their tribe. You can easily anticipate that the angered locals feel that the Tajiks do not understand their culture and do not respect local elders. The significance of your own objective for the Afghans would be "greater representation from their tribe will ensure that local elders are better respected by the ANP."*

*** Note that this significance does nothing to address or take action on the alleged abuse of power and shifts it to a positive action-based significance** Even if you do not succeed in getting 10 recruits, you will inspire the Alize tribal leaders to reevaluate their position in committing to local security and the local government. At the termination of the KLE, you will most likely have a commitment for a future KLE from the elders and should only then engage your ANP separately to address the abuse of power allegations.*

More often than not, (as described above) there is significance already nested in the objective of the KLE, but the leader can ensure it is there by asking "why does this matter to them?" In writing out the objective it remains intuitive to the small unit leader why it is important to CF, but this may not lend the same justification in the non-western train of thought for the typical Afghan leader participating in the KLE. If it is easy to identify the "why" for the Afghan leader, then you can expect to attack the objective and have the support of the Afghan members of the KLE. Dependent on the gravitas of the "why" you might expect Afghan support in immediately attacking the objective or it may require slight effort to extract. Either way, their support will be for attacking the KLE objective and not in attacking you. If you struggle to identify "why" your objective is relevant to Afghan leaders, then you will find yourself struggling not only in your efforts toward the objective, but also in

being assailed by the Afghan members of the KLE. If the issue at stake in the KLE is of significance only to CF, then the reaction from the Afghan leaders is sure to be initial apathy followed by increasing resistance if you continue to demand progress toward your own objective. Keep in mind that a perspective of viewing CF as an "occupier" is mistakenly confirmed more and more as you continue to force an issue unimportant to the Afghan population. If you cannot identify Afghan significance in your KLE objective, then it may be best to seek a new objective or to develop an intermediate objective and make progress toward your larger objective through several intermediate KLEs. This submission to a slow iterative process is often the most difficult aspect of the KLE to accept since leaders always seek immediate and demonstrable progress.

Rehearsals — To this point you have identified the dynamics of your audience and how you would choose to have them react, and you have identified your objective and its significance to the audience. With all this, you are prepared to execute a rehearsal of the meeting. Similar to rehearsals for kinetic operations, there are many techniques for rehearsals of the KLE. A rehearsal can be a full up execution of all talking points on site or it can be anything less than that as long as it includes the minimum attendees. These minimum attendees should be the primary CF representative and his most trusted cultural advisor. The minimum actions of a KLE rehearsal should include a discussion of recurring themes/common terms with your cultural advisors, a confirmation brief from your cultural advisors in their ability to paraphrase your KLE objective, and a discussion with your cultural advisors on how to achieve your desired reaction within the cross-cultural dynamic. The need to discuss common terms/recurring themes exists because it will often become necessary to explain a concept to your Afghan leaders numerous times. What is not necessary is to explain the concept to your cultural advisor each time during the KLE. Your cultural advisor should only need to be triggered to highlight or describe a common term/recurring theme and should be able to execute quickly on this trigger. This can only happen if he already knows those terms or concepts in depth. The next rehearsal action, the confirmation brief, is necessary to ensure that your cultural advisor is on-

board with your own objective. This is the least time-intensive part of the KLE rehearsal and is simply intended to verify that your own cultural advisor does not harbor any intent to block your efforts because of his own feelings on the issue. The final minimum requirement for any KLE rehearsal is soliciting your cultural advisors suggestion on how to elicit the desired reaction in the Afghan audience. If you've followed our plan thus far, this should already be complete.

Contingencies — The execution of rehearsals should prepare you thoroughly for your opportunity to speak in the KLE, but you must also be prepared for the most likely contingencies. The primary contingencies worthy of addressing are: the primary CF speaker departing the KLE, the primary cultural advisor becoming unable to continue, and an early exit from the KLE becoming necessary. Each of these instances should be considered with an alternate named and identified for the primary CF speaker and cultural advisor and a talking point ready to create a face-saving exit from the KLE should a tactical situation warrant your premature departure from the KLE site.

Setting the conditions — Often the site for the KLE is selected by the LN leader, but CF can exercise some influence in this process. The ideal site for a KLE is anywhere but a CF location. Consider again the fact that CF should not be responsible for execution of the KLE. By executing a KLE at a CF location, whether it be a COP or FOB, it creates a tendency among the LN leaders to defer to CF for initiation, management and closing of the meeting. This is not the desired course of action, so all efforts should be put forth to avoid the KLE on what would be termed "our ground."

One area where TM Havoc forces had consistent success was in executing KLEs in vicinity of the local multi-tribe mosque. The primary consideration is that the KLE should never happen in the vicinity of a mosque that services only one sub-tribe or one faction within the local population. Ask specifically for the mosque "where everyone is welcome" and utilize a location in that vicinity. This prevents CF from being perceived as being sided with one sub-tribe or faction within the village and ensures that the location established is one that all local power brokers can feel comfortable attending.



During Operation Winter Stand in January 2008, coalition forces and local national leaders meet in a neutral tribal area of Charbaran District.

It is important to note that a KLE should never happen within any mosque or within any attached structure that could be misconstrued as part of the adjoining mosque. Even when assurance is received from the local mullah or imam that CF have permission to enter, CF forces should never consider entering the mosque (This occurred only one time in TM Havoc's experience).

An open courtyard within sight of the mosque or adjacent to the mosque is the location of choice. The next best location is an open farm field outside the village. Here as well, all effort should be made to persuade LN leaders to choose a location that is common-ground for all tribes. Finally, when available, the district center or ANP station is the default location. But, this will be an option available in only one village within each district, and CF must become comfortable working outside of this location in order to gain and maintain the perception that they work for the people.

Negative influencers — If your KLE is understood to be an effective forum for making progress in your battlespace, then there will be the inevitable efforts by ACM to sabotage such non-kinetic efforts through both kinetic and non-kinetic means. This article does not address the major concerns of crowd control or site security as those considerations, in and of themselves, are subjects entirely and worthy of their own focus and careful development in a separate professional discussion. This article, however, does recommend actions to prevent non-kinetic ACM efforts against your KLE and focuses those actions on the time frame in which they could be executed with greatest effect — immediately before KLE actually begins.

ACM negative influencers will always be present at or conducting reconnaissance for future presence at these meetings, and efforts must be made to address this action prior to initiating your

KLE. In the simplest form, negative influencers must always be excluded or arrested before the KLE begins. Taking any action during or after the KLE will inspire a fear in Afghan members of the KLE that CF "oppressors" will target those who speak against them during the meeting. For this reason you want to exclude negative influencers specifically before the meeting starts. Before any conversations are initiated, you should scan the room to identify any suspected persons and then ask them to depart the vicinity if there is any doubt. In the case of arrests, these should also specifically be completed prior to initiating the KLE. This presents the incredible opportunity to explain such actions and provide justification during the KLE

for the previous arrest to the one audience who will best receive such justification. This approach will be widely accepted, and CF and ANP efforts will be subsequently supported with vigor. If an opportunity for an arrest prior to the meeting is inadvertently missed, then the most advisable course of action (COA) is to shift your meeting objective to obtaining permission for the arrest of a KLE member during the KLE itself. This is definitely not the preferred COA as it will terminate any further actions or progress that might have been had within the intended KLE. When deemed necessary by the small unit leader, then that leader must be prepared to extend the KLE for a duration of at least twice that anticipated as deliberations regarding the arrest will dominate and absolutely prolong the KLE. Finally, the least advisable COA is to arrest after the KLE. Small unit leaders should avoid this action at all costs as it will create negative perceptions that will be difficult to overcome even in many future iterations of KLEs. These negative perceptions will be capitalized on by ACM Information Operations (IO) efforts and will be widely portrayed as "the CF will arrest you if you attend their meetings." This will result in a marked decline in attendance, interest, and participation in your next KLEs. This works specifically against the overall purpose for executing the KLE in the first place.

Executing the KLE

Timeliness — The Afghan culture, like all primitive cultures, retains a concept of time that is spatially based. This is to say that they utilize time and distance interchangeably. When asking for distances between two points, be very prepared to hear responses like "that village is 45 minutes away," or "the cache is two days over that hill." Because the typical valuation of accuracy in such measurements is 90 percent, that also becomes the expected

standard for being accurately on time. That 10 percent of time lost could be considerable. Ten percent of the longest daylight period in Afghanistan could equal up to 90 minutes. Be prepared for attendees in outlying areas to be that late in arriving for the KLE. Such tardiness will only be noted by CF and not even addressed by LNs as an issue worthy of their consideration since it is widely accepted that 90-percent accuracy is the standard. With this fact, do not expect to start on time, but always express the desire to start on time and stress that it is important. Making this point will become tiresome, but you will see the 10 percent error drop to less than 5 percent when your KLEs are consistently scheduled. Finally, most meetings are scheduled to begin between 9 and 10 a.m. This is a time that is accepted as the Afghan standard and will be well received and understood as the natural starting time for any meeting.

Opening Praise — Contrary to our western conventions and expectations, the Afghan KLE begins with conversation that does anything but introduce the point of focus and does everything to avoid efficiency. It is only after the first 15-20 minutes of speeches that the KLE actually starts. While most small unit leaders would be comfortable with introducing the main point directly at the outset of the engagement, this is not culturally sound and does not benefit the engagement process. The typical Afghan leader is accustomed to initiating a meeting with a monologue of praise for all others in attendance. The expectation is that each key player will deliver his monologue of praise for the others in attendance prior to any business actually being conducted. This cultural formality often frustrates non-Afghans. Most western leaders would choose to skip this process entirely — and the unseasoned leader will often do so with nothing but negative consequences to follow — but, it is incredibly important to remain patient and tolerate the process. Acknowledging that the KLE is taking place to arrive at some understanding or compromise, the initial appeasement of egos through this exaggerated praise sets the conditions that will allow subsequent negotiations. If one party or the other is more likely to concede or compromise simply because they have been given honors from the outset, then the wait is entirely justified.

Not only should CF leaders tolerate this method of opening the engagement, they should be equally flattering of their Afghan counterparts at the outset of the engagement. In the event that the particular background or accomplishments of a specific Afghan leader are unknown, it would be prudent to praise the particular tribe or region. Examples of these introductory compliments might include the small unit leader thanking the Afghan leaders for their previous efforts, dedication, demonstrated courage, perseverance, etc. Further compliments might be centered on the great history of Afghan warriors and their respect in the international community. The small unit leader should always attempt to close his introductory praise by focusing on the fact that CF are guests of the GIRoA and that the hospitality shown to CF by our “Afghan brothers” is greatly appreciated and will not be forgotten.

Addressing the KLE Power Brokers — Recalling that the KLE will be primarily managed by an LN leader, the opportunities for the small unit leader to speak should ideally be very limited. If the LN leader presents the CF with the opportunity to speak after each set of LN comments, then the small unit leader should defer until his comments can make the most impact. In the best case scenario, the small unit leader would allow the LN leader to transition the KLE from the introductory praise to acknowledgment of the meeting’s importance then to introduction of the problem and finally begin his initial approach to the problem. Once this is complete, the LN leader will typically call on the other members of the KLE to speak. The LN leader will first allow those members of the KLE with greatest interest in the problem to speak their perspectives. Only after the major power brokers have introduced their “friction point” or resistance to the LN leader’s own perspective should the CF small unit leader speak. This creates a moment of greatest tension amongst the Afghan members of the KLE and ensures that all interest is peaked. In absolutely every case (even when the power brokers are wrong in their comments), the CF leader should address that he understands the power brokers’ previous comments and appreciates their wise views on the issue. Opening your own comments in this manner allows your words to be better received and prevents the power brokers from “shutting off” when

you voice your views. Even in the event that your stance on the issue is completely opposite that of the power brokers, you should acknowledge that they are wise and very worthy of representing the issue. Then transition into an approach that shows that their views would be correct if the issue were in fact as they see it. Point out that the issue is truly different and how you have a personal stake in the issue.

An example would be: *“Your elders are wise and what they state is true. If coalition forces really didn’t care for this village, then they would not have done anything to address the need for a well. I would agree and would say the same myself if it were the case. But the unknown truth is that coalition forces have taken action on this issue. We do care. I had expected to see the well complete on this visit, but we simply cannot get the well contractor to come here because of his security concerns for moving on the roads. Now we are worried for the people of this village because we truly understand the need for safe drinking water. We need your help in making sure the contractor feels secure to drive here so that together we address our problem — if we can get create a security agreement today then we will see if we can find a new contractor.”*

Such an approach as described above can be structured around the most typical issues raised by power brokers and is an approach that is much better received than if the small unit leader were simply to open his comments by saying “you are wrong, CF do ...”

In the event that the power brokers have a similar perspective to yours, then you can go forward with ease, but you should continue to open by deferring to the wise input from the LN leaders. Go forward with an approach that is based on how you support the power brokers because they are correct. Avoid an approach based on how the power brokers are supporting your perspective because CF are correct. This does nothing to increase reception for your eventual proposal for achieving your KLE objective.

Making Progress in the KLE

Getting to your Objective — After addressing the power brokers in a manner that has ensured that they save face when they are wrong or has reinforced their perspective when they are right, you can

If a member of the KLE makes an emotional outburst and attempts to elicit support, then do not react with your own outburst. Inexperienced small unit leaders often find it difficult to receive an emotional outburst and not return fire. The best course of action is to remain calm, allow the outburst to terminate, and then inform the outburst-generating individual that such actions will not be tolerated and he will be asked to leave if it occurs again.

now move on to making progress toward your own objective for the KLE. Unfortunately, there is no one secret to success in attaining your objective for the KLE. What we can provide are guidelines that will direct you in the best manner to move towards your objective. These guidelines are generalized since they are intended to support the multitude of objectives that small unit leaders will struggle with in the many and varied KLEs they will conduct.

First, you should always make the objective a shared objective. Make the problem not “your” problem but “our” problem. This has already been emphasized earlier in this article when you sought to identify the “why” for the Afghan members and sought to nest that “why” in your own objective. If you view the objective as a shared objective, then you are already on the right path to achieve at least some progress. If you view the objective as only their problem, then you are in the wrong mind-set to make progress.

Second, in making progress toward your goal, you should never react to emotional outbursts. If a member of the KLE makes an emotional outburst and attempts to elicit support, then do not react with your own outburst. Inexperienced small unit leaders often find it difficult to receive an emotional outburst and not return fire. The best course of action is to remain calm, allow the outburst to terminate, and then inform the outburst-generating individual that such actions will not be tolerated and he will be asked to leave if it occurs again. Further inform him that if he feels strongly, then he will be given an opportunity to speak subsequently but only if he speaks with reason and not emotion. Do nothing to address his emotionally-based negative comments or even allow your own comments and progress to be derailed. Simply return to the point you were covering when the outburst occurred and then continue on.

Last, always put the problem before the solution and never make a promise. In the previous example, note that the problem was clearly stated followed by the proposed solution. Further, note that the solution is structured as a conditional statement for attempted action based on the shared problem. This is clearly done to create the action/conditional reaction clause to your efforts and prevents the common pitfall of making a clear promise. If you create a conditional basis for taking action and always phrase it as your follow-on attempt to attain progress, then you will avoid the trap of making a commitment to deliver.

General Actions During the KLE — Be seen taking notes! This has a positive effect on the members of the KLE. Even if you simply write your own speaking notes or reminders, the simple act of writing anything forwards the perception throughout the KLE that you care enough to record the comments and you are genuinely committed. Simply sitting in place and listening will not achieve

anywhere near the same effects.

Use power words and give as much detail as necessary in your examples. Remember that the common Afghan is not exposed to mass media of any form, and his attention can be easily gained by using descriptive and vivid examples. They will remain attentive as long you put effort into painting the picture you want them to see.

Use body language when you desire to make a point. For the same justification as above, don't be afraid to be too theatrical. If you use effective body language, then your comments will be well understood even before your cultural advisor completes his translation.

Intelligence Gathering — Inexperienced leaders will often consider the KLE to be a forum to gather intelligence. This is a perspective that is out of synchronization with Afghan culture. It is clearly un-Afghan to speak out against an individual or group in an open forum. Instead it is entirely customary to support and defend an individual or group in a large forum, and it is culturally expected at all costs. This uniquely Afghan social convention is adhered to even when all members in attendance are clearly and firmly aware that the individual or group in question is guilty. What does yield progress in intelligence gathering is identification of your intelligence requirements, a stated commitment to maintain the privacy of any individuals who can provide intelligence, and a stated location to meet after the completion of the KLE for collection of intelligence. You will be surprised to find that often a “break out group” will emerge after the KLE and you will have two or three individuals willing to address your intelligence-gathering efforts. In these smaller follow-on KLEs, you should make every attempt to integrate members of your Human Intelligence Collection Team (HCT) — who should have previously been only passive observers and non-players in the KLE events to that point.

Closing the KLE

Reinforce Efforts — In terminating the KLE you should vie for a final opportunity to address the power brokers and should avoid allowing the KLE to close without your comments. If done properly you will have spoken at the outset to deliver praise and spoken to follow the initial round of power broker comments with your own comments and your own efforts to arrive at the objective. Now the small unit leader should be speaking a third time to reinforce his efforts in future progress toward the objective or to summarize an agreement (if one was had in the KLE). In completely closing out the CF statements, the small unit leader should always express his desire to be part of a future KLE because of his vested interest in seeing progress in that particular area.

Departing with Pashtun-Wali — The point of expressing desire to attend a future meeting is to solicit an invite from the LN leaders for your attendance for the subsequent KLE. This gains the required support from Afghans known as their social code of Pashtun-Wali. This, according to Afghan convention, requires that the host demonstrate absolute responsibility for his guests. Most importantly it includes a guarantee of security during the next KLE with that tribe/sub-tribe/set of power brokers. Finally it is important to note your pleasure in having been given the honor to participate in the KLE and interact with leaders of such wisdom. This praise should serve to close out your comments and does well to transition to the final speaker who should be the LN leader responsible for managing the meeting. Once comments are complete,

Figure 1 — Key Points on Planning and Conducting a Key Leader's Engagement

In structuring your approach to show your commitment to the KLE effectiveness, you should:

- * Remember that the KLE is uniquely different from a relationship building meeting.
- * Identify the dynamics of your audience and how you can appropriately achieve your desired reaction from your audience while adhering to cultural norms.
- * Write out your KLE objective and keep it handy during your comments in order to steer toward your KLE objective.
- * Always seek to establish the answer to why your objective is important to Afghan leaders; or else seek a new KLE objective that is.
- * Execute rehearsals at a minimum with your cultural advisor and have him confirm your approach, his support for your objective, and his understanding of common terms.
- * Establish alternate speakers and cultural advisors in support of contingencies.
- * Avoid executing the KLE on a CF FOB or COP but instead look for common tribal ground to execute the KLE.
- * Address negative influencers prior to initiating the KLE, but never after the KLE.
- * Accept starting late, but always seek to improve timeliness.
- * Be accepting of the opening comments of praise and follow such comments with your own praise for the Afghan leaders/culture /tribe/history.
- * No matter what their stance on the issue, address power brokers as "wise" and well worthy of tackling the problem.
- * Always make the issue a common one; always seek to display it as "our problem."
- * In moving towards a solution to the problem, avoid reacting to emotional outbursts; establish the expectation that emotional outbursts will not be tolerated.
- * When proposing the recommended solution, always put the problem statement before the solution statement.
- * Always phrase your commitment in an action/conditional-reaction structure in order to avoid making promises.
- * Work to get an invitation for a future KLE; this guarantees a commitment to security of the site and attendees.
- * Thank the elders for the opportunity to participate.
- * Depart quickly.

always seek to depart the location quickly. This prevents you from being approached and solicited by minimal power-players for your attention to their peripheral and often irrelevant issues.

Summary

In the COIN fight, the KLE provides the only true progress in winning the population and is the only tool that can build confidence that change will truly bring opportunity. It is the only tool that has effect in inspiring Afghans that they themselves can have control over their own future. It is the only tool that presents the opportunity to influence the population in a socially agreeable manner. Most importantly, the KLE legitimizes the idea that CF are not the demon infidels and are a force that truly cares and has an interest in the problems and challenges faced by the Afghan people.

The previously stated recommendations for conducting a KLE put forth by TM Havoc leaders have been intended to serve small unit leaders in making each moment spent within the KLE absolutely effective. TM Havoc leaders have arrived at these recommendations through tough lessons learned in difficult KLEs in Gomal, Surobi and Charbaran Districts of Paktika Province during OEF VIII, but these recommendations will continue to apply throughout all OEF locations and iterations. Through the future application of these lessons learned in our KLEs, other small unit leaders can enter their own KLEs better prepared to bring positive change to the people of Afghanistan and better prepared to further COIN efforts with the greatest effect in all LoOs. Good luck.

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